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THE
OPINION
OF THE

Pious and Learned 7

Mrs. Eyre,

DAUGHTER to the Excellent
LADY PACKINGTON,

Concerning

The DOCTRINE of
Passive - Obedience,

AS THE
Distinguishing Character of the
CHURCH of *England.*

In a LETTER of Her's to a Friend,
occasion'd by Bishop *Lake's* Declaration,
That he dy'd in the Belief thereof.

L O N D O N :

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as seasonable for these Times. 1710.

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A
LETTER
FROM

Mrs. *EYRE*,

CONCERNING

The Doctrine of PASSIVE-
OBEDIENCE.

DEAR SIR,

YOU may wonder, that at this time of day I should begin to talk to you of Bishop *Lake's* Death, for which, I dare say, both of us have before this paid our just Tribute of Sorrow; and for whose Memory every *True Protestant* must have a very particular Respect, so long as the Courage and Constancy

stancy of the *Seven Bishops* remain upon Record; which I verily believe will be till time shall be no more. But some (as if this Glorious Action had not been enough to have secur'd his Fame to all Eternity) seem rather desirous to transmit him to Posterity by another Distinguishing Character; that of the Great Champion for *Passive-Obedience*; thinking that to be a greater Honour than to be recorded for one of the great Maintainers and Assertors of the *Protestant Religion*, and the *English Liberties*. For there is a Paper sent abroad about our Country, attested not only by his own Hand, but also by several unquestionable Witnesses, wherein the Good Bishop on his Death-Bed declares, *That he had been brought up in, and had also taught others that great Doctrine of Passive-Obedience, which he always look'd upon as the Distinguishing Character of the Church of England; and that he would not have taken the Oath, tho' the Penalty had been Loss of Life; but found great Satisfaction and Consolation in his Mind because he had not taken it; and these he desir'd might be look'd upon as the Words of a Dying Man, and so represented to his Friends.*

But whether those Friends had not done him as good Service if they had kept it to themselves, and not represented it to the World,

World, I think may be a Question: for, I must confess, 'tis a little unaccountable to me what Designs they could have in Publishing it. For 'tis so far from being necessary on the Bishop's Account, that 'twas really impertinent. For he that at that time was under, and had submitted to, a Suspension, merely upon his Refusal of the Oaths, had certainly given the World as convincing a Proof of his Opinion, as if he had printed a Thousand Volumes about it. So that there was no more occasion (I think of making, but I am sure) of publishing such a Declaration, than there is for my Lord Bishop of *Cant.* to print *Manifestoes*, to tell the People he is suspended on the same account.

And since there was so very little Reason to do it on the Bishop's Score, the Motives and Designs had need be very good that can justify their doing it on their own. Had either they or the Bishop given us the Reasons of his adhering to that Opinion, besides that of his being bred and born in it, (an Argument that a *Turk* or *Pagan* may have for the Truth of their Religion,) they might have oblig'd the World exceedingly. But the only Motives, at least that are to me apparent, for telling us what we knew before, I think might as well have been spared. For there are two Inferences which

may very easily be made from the Paper, and which I suspect was the chief Aim in publishing it.

The First is to insinuate, That, from the beginning of the Reformation, ever since the Church of *England* was restor'd to its Purity, *Passive-Obedience* was the Corner-stone of it ; for 'tis call'd, *The Distinguishing Character of the Church of England* : so that it seems none were accounted her true Sons that did not hold it. Now if this be true, here's the whole Body of the Clergy in Queen *Elizabeth's* Days cut off from the Church of *England* at one Blow ; for 'tis not the Opinion of one or two private Prelates, but the whole *Convocation*, who agree not only in giving the Queen so very large Subsidies, but also in declaring the Accounts on which they did it ; and that was assisting and protecting the *Scotch* and *French Protestants*, and for abating all Hostilities against the true Professors of God's Holy Gospel, and for the advancing the free Profession of the Gospel within and without Her Majesty's Dominions ; and a great deal more to this purpose, as may be seen at large in the Preambles to the Three Subsidy Bills, given the 5th of *Eliz.* c. 24. the 35th of *Eliz.* c. 12. and the 43^d of *Eliz.* c. 17. So that 'tis apparent it was their Practice for
Forty

Forty Years. And I hope their Faith also: for I cannot be so uncharitable as to think they would sin against their Conscience, and purchase Damnation at so dear a rate, as those vast Sums they gave for the Assistance of those that I am sure did resist their Kings; and who, according to the Doctrine of *Passive-Obedience*, ought to have been look'd upon, and us'd as Rebels. And truly, whatever is pretended, their Doctrine was agreeable to their Practice. For, altho' the Book of *Homilies* hath been so often cited for the Confirmation of this Doctrine, yet the Example of *David*, which is so much recommended to us in the 2^d *Homily* against *Rebellion*, for his Loyalty and our Imitation, is that we desire to stand or fall by. For if the Subject may be allow'd to take up (as we are sure *David* did against *Saul*) Defensive Arms, I think they would be very unreasonable to desire any more.

But this having been enlarg'd on by better Pens, I shall say no more of it. But I cannot pass by the Epithet of the *Distinguishing Character of the Church of England*, without some *Animadversions* on it: And, first, I would ask you, Sir, Whether you think it necessary for particular Churches to have particular *distinguishing* Doctrines? For I must confess, to me (but if I am in an Error I hope you will correct it) it ap-

pears so far from necessary, that I think
 'tis very inconvenient when particular
 Churches have such distinguishing Do-
 ctrines : for I believe it has been the occa-
 sion of all the Schisms in the World. For
 since, as the Apostle saith, *Eph. 4. 5.* there
 is but *one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism ;*
 and I may add, *one Church, and one Truth ;*
 Why should we not (at least endeavour to)
 be all of one Mind, and not affect little Di-
 stinctions, which oftentimes create great Ani-
 mosities? of which our present Age can give
 too many sad Instances. But alas, the
 Disease did not begin, neither will it, I fear,
 end with us. For we find *St. Paul* repro-
 ving it in his *Corinthians*, as that which
 occasion'd all their Divisions ; while one
 cry'd he was of *Paul*, and another of *Apol-
 los*, and I of *Cephas*, and I of *Christ* : So
 that it seems they did not only give their
 particular Teachers the Preference above
 others, but also set them in Opposition to
 Christ. But to such I may ask the Apo-
 stle's Question, Who is *Paul*, or who is
Apollos, but Ministers by whom you have
 believ'd ? But if *Paul*, or an *Angel*, Preach
 any other Gospel, let him be *Anathema* ;
 and the same thing may, and I think ought
 be said of Churches, when they impose
 any-thing but what is the true Catholick
 Faith. Therefore to say such a Doctrine
 is

is particular to such a Church, and that which distinguisheth it from the Catholick, is indeed to say the worst thing in the World of it ; and to own that it is not any part of the Catholick Faith. And why Bishop *Lake*, or any body, should value a Doctrine so much on that score, is that I cannot comprehend. In my Opinion, it would more have become his Lordship, if, as the Office for the Sick directs, he had made a Confession of the Christian Faith contain'd in the Apostle's Creed, which unquestionably he believ'd. But it would satisfy us *Lay-People* very much, if those Gentlemen who have attested this *Recognition* of his *distinguishing* Faith, would Print another Paper, to assure us that he rehears'd the Articles of our *Common Creed* ; that we may not be mis-led by the Example of a Bishop, to depart from the Rules of the Church when we come to die ; and, instead of the Christian Faith, declare we believe just quite contrary to his *Distinguishing* Faith, that in some Cases *Resistance* is lawful.

But I fear I have already tired you by being so large on my First Inference, therefore shall endeavour to be as short on the Second as I can ; and that I take to be this ; That from the Bishop's declaring He would not have taken the Oath to have *saved his*
Life ;

Life ; and that his not taking it was the *great Consolation* he had at that time ; they would insinuate that the taking of the Oath is a very wicked unlawful thing. For they being the Words of a Dying Man, just going to receive the *Sacrament*, ought to be the more credited, and to make the deeper Impression ; for so good a Man as he could not be easily deceiv'd himself, and at such a time 'tis certain did not design to deceive others.

To which I shall crave leave to reply, *First*, That as to the main Question of the Lawfulness of the Oath, it has been so fully and so satisfactorily discuss'd already, that I am very confident you and I know some that have taken it with as good a Conscience as Bishop *Lake*, or any-body, could refuse it with ; therefore it would be superfluous to say any-thing on that Point. But only I wish that, instead of urging any Humane Example, both Sides would remember the Divine Rule of *St. Paul*, *Rom. 14. 3. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not ; and let not him that eateth not judge him that eateth.*

But then, *Secondly*, as to the Authority that Bishop *Lake's* Dying Words ought to have over mine or any Man's Judgment, I must declare, That till Infallibility be, I will not say the distinguishing Character,
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but the inseparable Attendant of a good Man, I cannot say that they ought to influence any-body any farther than they appear true and reasonable. For if Dying Mens Sentiments were to be the Rule of our Faith, we should have a very uncertain Standard. For you must know that once I was acquainted with a Papist, that, I think, setting aside his Opinion, was a very good Man, for he led a good Life; and when this Person came to die, he did it with as great Confidence, and Comfort too, as could be imagin'd; and express'd as great Satisfaction in his not being a Protestant, as the Bishop could in not taking the Oaths. So that we may see 'tis only the strong Persuasion of the Party, and not the Truth of the Tenets, that produces that sort of Consolation. For I am confident the Bishop himself would not have approv'd of the Argument, had I turn'd Papist on that Dying Man's Declaration. But it seems some think it no great matter what we turn now; for I hear some are so exceeding fierce, that they will hardly allow those which have taken the new Oaths to be so much as Out-lyers of the Church of *England*; but to be sure none must be within the Pale that have not the distinguishing Character. And truly the Number of the Enclos'd will be so small, that King *James* himself could
hardly

hardly have hop'd to have contracted the Church of *England* into so small a compass ; and may in part be said to have got his Ends of us, for I am sure he has done more Mischief by the Divisions he has occasion'd among our selves, than he could have done by his Persecutions.

But although some Persons indiscreet Zeal have made them so uncharitable, I am as far from supposing it the Temper of all the worthy Men of that Party, as I am from believing the Doctrine of *Passive-Obedience* in that *unlimited* Sense it was preach'd up by some, was the universal Opinion of the Church of *England* in any Age. For, that it was not so for Forty Years of Queen *Elizabeth's* Reign, has been made pretty evident by Matter of Fact ; and that it is not so at this Day, I think may be demonstrated by the same way of Argumentation. For although I might have suppos'd it possible that a few particular private Persons might, for Interest-sake, have disclaim'd their former Opinion, and comply'd with any-thing ; yet truly I have so much Respect for the Clergy of the Church of *England*, as not to believe that the whole Body of them could be guilty of so mean a thing ; to say no worse of it. For really the Non-jurors, in comparison, are so few, that had there not been

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been some Names of Note among them, they would hardly have been reckon'd a Number ; which gives me great Hopes that those great and good Men, whom we look'd upon as the Pillars of our Church, would not forsake the Stations they so well became, for the sake of a particular private Doctrine, which was no way essential either to the being or well-being of the Church ; but whose only use was to distinguish the Church of *England* from all the Churches in the World, that is really from the Catholick Church. For this Bishop *Lake* seems to me to own, when he calls it the *distinguishing Character* of the Church of *England* ; and so truly it may still continue if they please, for I believe there is no other Church so fond of it, as to rob us of it, if it is to be carry'd so high as some would have it.

But if taken in its limited and true Sense, Passive-Obedience must be acknowledg'd so necessary a Duty, that the World could not well subsist without it. And I am very confident, that all the Difference about it has been occasion'd by a little Mistake, in applying those Rules to Communities, which were given to particular Private Persons, and only design'd for such. For although in my single private Capacity I ought to submit to, and suffer, the greatest Injustice, rather

rather than disobey the lawful Magistrate, and disturb the Government : Yet, as I am an English-man, I think I am as much oblig'd, by all Tyes, both Civil and Sacred, to defend and maintain that Government and Constitution of which I am a Member, as I am to obey the King ; and that being the Primary Obligation, ought to be discharg'd in the first place ; but the Safety of that being secur'd, Subjects ought to obey without any other Reserve. And this seems to me so evident, that I think it needs no further Proof, though 'tis capable of the clearest, if it were necessary, as I hope it is not. For, after all, I am very confident that the greatest and best of our Non-jurors are of my Mind in this Point, as might very easily be prov'd, if they would please but truly to resolve me one Question ; that is, Whether they did not both wish and pray, that *London-derry* should be deliver'd out of the Hands of those merciless Butchers ? And this, the Excellency of their Temper, as well as their Christianity, obliging to, I cannot at all question but they did ; nay, I verily believe they would have gone further, and assisted them with their Purfes, if they had known how to have convey'd them Relief.

And now pray let us a little consider the Consequences of this ; for if the Doctrine

is true, *That 'tis unlawful to take up Arms for the Defence of our Lives and Liberties*; then all those great and gallant Men were certainly great Rebels, and whoever did assist or abett them, incurr'd the same Guilt; so that, for any-thing I see, we may all shake Hands as to that Matter. But in case I should be mistaken, and they were not so good-natur'd, (as I do still believe they were) but did desire that so many thousand Innocent Persons might fall into the Hands of their bloody implacable Enemies: If, I say, they could wish this, it would give me a greater Prejudice against the Doctrine than ever yet I had. Since it not only made them put off those Bowels of Mercies which Christians ought to have for one another, but even divested them of common Humanity. For, unless it be the *Papists*, I know no other Sect that is arriv'd to that height of Barbarity, as to wish, that so many thousand Persons, (whom they never saw, and who never did them any wrong) should perish, only because they were not of their Opinion. And if this could be their Temper, I'm sure I would never be their Profelyte; for I should dread it as much as *Popery* it self; and so truly I believe those good Men do.

But I forgot my self, having already, I fear, exceeded the Bounds of a Letter, and trespass'd

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trespass'd too much on your Patience. But
whatever the Effect may be, I hope the
Cause is pardonable, because it proceeds
from that entire Confidence I have both in
your Judgment and Friendship, that all my
Notions must be approv'd by you, before
they can be so, by,

Dear Sir,

Your most entirely affectionate

Friend and Servant.

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F I N I S.